

**Written Testimony of Susan Eastwood, Board Member,
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Connecticut Education Fund,
Inc.
Before the Connecticut General Assembly
Joint Committee on Labor and Public Employees
January 31, 2017**

**Testimony in Support of H.B. 5210, An Act Concerning Various Pay Equity and
Fairness Matters.**

Dear Senator Gomes, Senator Miner, Representative Porter and honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Susan Eastwood; I am a Board member on the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Connecticut Education Fund, and a former Commissioner on Connecticut's Permanent Commission of the Status of Women.

I am here representing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Connecticut, the new non-profit which was formed as a result of the elimination in the FY 17 budget of the former state agency of the same name.

I am testifying in support of **H.B. 5210, An Act Concerning Various Pay Equity and Fairness Matters**. It is well-known that women still do not receive equal pay for equal work. According to the most recent data from the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR.org), nationally, women earn about 80 cents for every dollar earned by men and this gap is even more pronounced for women of color – black women earn 63 cents and Hispanic women earn 54 cents as compared to white men.

Women are the only majority (51% of the population and 48.7% of the CT labor force) that has consistently been treated as a minority – wrongly, inequitably and as second class citizens. This economic injustice affects not only women, but every man and child who has a woman in their lives.

If Connecticut women earned the same as men, the poverty rate in our state would be cut by more than half. The Institute for Women's Policy Research estimates that women's earnings in Connecticut would increase by \$6.9 billion per year if women earned equal pay.

To be clear this is **\$6.9 billion lost annually by Connecticut women** – women who are consumers, savers, and owners of assets.

HB 5210 will help to remedy this inequity by strengthening provisions of the law concerning pay equity and fairness. Prohibiting an employer from asking an applicant for their salary history (1) will level the playing field for women and strengthen their negotiating power. Similarly, in (2) an employee's previous wage or salary history may not be used against them in an equal pay lawsuit. And in (4), protecting “seniority pay differentials from adverse adjustments for time spent on leave due to pregnancy-related conditions or protected parental, family and medical leave” will prevent wage discrimination for those who take time off to bond with a new baby, or to care for a loved one.

With respect to Section (3), I feel that the bill language should be strengthened to clarify what “good faith efforts” means and set standards to judge them by. While I understand that employers want an affirmative defense, this seems designed to allow them to set their own minimum standards and then self-evaluate their efforts to achieve pay equity within their own business.

As a trainer for the WAGE Project, I have taught workshops for college age women in how to negotiate for equal pay in their first jobs and seen their faces when they realize that they stand to lose up to two million dollars in pay during their lifetimes due to the inequitable wages paid to women. I do this work because I don’t want my daughter, grand-daughters and their generations of women to have to fight this battle too.

Much remains to be done. Congresswoman DeLauro has introduced the Paycheck Fairness Act in every Congress since 1997, and Congress has yet to act on this basic legislation built on principles of fairness. Last year, Massachusetts passed, and Governor Baker signed, the most comprehensive equal pay law in the nation with unanimous bipartisan support. The law creates standards to measure comparable work, such as skill, responsibility and working conditions. It restricts employers from asking job candidates about salary history, and gives legal incentives to companies that conduct salary audits. We encourage Connecticut to follow Massachusetts’ bipartisan example.

Now more than ever it is up to states like Connecticut to set the example for the nation. Thank you again for the opportunity to represent the PCSW here today and for raising this important issue for debate in the Connecticut General Assembly.